

the valuable additional benefits that private plans provide.

We must act now to provide every Medicare member with more choices and more savings. Medicare needs a fair system of competition, a system that encourages additional benefits and options for better care at lower cost. Medicare is crucial to elderly Americans. I urge members of both parties to work together to protect and improve Medicare and to maintain our moral commitment to millions of Americans.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:10 a.m. on May 17 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on May 18. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 17 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks Announcing the Initiative for a New Cuba

May 20, 2002

Bienvenidos. Welcome to the White House for the 100th anniversary of Cuban independence. Today we honor the ties of friendship and family and faith that unite the Cuban people and the people of the United States. We honor the contributions that Cuban Americans have made to all aspects of our national life. And today I am issuing a proposal and a challenge that can put Cuba on the path to liberty.

I appreciate our Secretary of State being here. He and I take this issue very seriously. He loves freedom as much as I love freedom. I want to thank Mel Martinez, a graduate of Pedro Pan, for being here. Mr. Secretary, you're doing a great job. Welcome.

I appreciate members of the diplomatic corps who are here. Thank you all for coming; I'm honored to have you here.

I want to thank Senator George Allen from the Commonwealth of Virginia. I want to thank Congressman Dan Burton; Mr. Chairman. And of course, two great Members of the United States Congress, people who have got a lot to offer, a lot of sound advice: Ileana

Ros-Lehtinen and Lincoln Diaz-Balart. Thank you all for coming.

Cuba's independence one century ago today was the inspiration of great thinkers such as Felix Varela. It was the result of determination and talent on the part of a great statesman such as Jose Marti and great soldiers such as Antonio Maceo and Maximo Gomez. Most of all, Cuba's independence was the product of the great courage and sacrifice of the Cuban people.

Today, and every day for the past 43 years, that legacy of courage has been insulted by a tyrant who uses brutal methods to enforce a bankrupt vision. That legacy has been debased by a relic from another era who has turned a beautiful island into a prison.

In a career of oppression, Mr. Castro has imported nuclear-armed ballistic missiles, and he has exported his military forces to encourage civil war abroad. He is a dictator who jails and tortures and exiles his political opponents. We know this. The Cuban people know this, and the world knows this. After all, just a month ago the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, in a resolution proposed by the nations of Latin America, called upon Cuba's Government to finally—to finally—begin respecting the human rights of its people.

Through all their pains and deprivation, the Cuban people's aspirations for freedom are undiminished. We see this today in Havana, where more than 11,000 brave citizens have petitioned their Government for a referendum on basic freedoms. If that referendum is allowed, it can be a prelude, a beginning for real change in Cuba.

The United States has no designs on Cuban sovereignty. It's not a part of our strategy or a part of our vision. In fact, the United States has been a strong and consistent supporter of freedom for the Cuban people. And it is important for those who love freedom on that beautiful island to know that our support for them will never waver.

Today I'm announcing an Initiative for a New Cuba that offers Cuba's Government a way forward towards democracy and hope and better relations with the United States.

Cuba's scheduled to hold elections to its National Assembly in 2003. Let me read Article 71 of the Cuban Constitution. It says,

“The National Assembly is composed of deputies elected by free, direct, and secret vote.” That’s what the constitution says. Yet since 1959, no election in Cuba has come close to meeting these standards. In most elections, there has been one candidate, Castro’s candidate. All elections in Castro’s Cuba have been a fraud. The voices of the Cuban people have been suppressed, and their votes have been meaningless. That’s the truth. *Es la verdad*.

In the 2003 National Assembly elections in Cuba, Cuba has the opportunity to offer Cuban voters the substance of democracy, not its hollow, empty forms. Opposition parties should have the freedom to organize, assemble, and speak, with equal access to all airwaves. All political prisoners must be released and allowed to participate in the election process. Human rights organizations should be free to visit Cuba to ensure that the conditions for free elections are being created. And the 2003 elections should be monitored by objective outside observers. These are the minimum steps necessary to make sure that next year’s elections are the true expression of the will of the Cuban people.

I also challenge Cuba’s Government to ease its stranglehold, to change its stranglehold on private economic activity. Political and economic freedoms go hand in hand, and if Cuba opens its political system, fundamental questions about its backward economic system will come into sharper focus.

If the Cuban Government truly wants to advance the cause of workers, of Cuban workers, surely it will permit trade unions to exist outside of Government control. If Cuba wants to create more good-paying jobs, private employers have to be able to negotiate with and pay workers of their own choosing, without the Government telling who they can hire and who they must fire.

If Cuba wants to attract badly needed investment from abroad, property rights must be respected. If the Government wants to improve the daily lives of its people, goods and services produced in Cuba should be made available to all Cuban citizens. Workers employed by foreign companies should be paid directly by their employers, instead of having the Government seize their hard-cur-

rency wages and pass on a pittance in the form of pesos. And the signs at hotels reading “*Solamente Turistas*” should finally be taken down.

Without major steps by Cuba to open up its political system and its economic system, trade with Cuba will not help the Cuban people. It’s important for Americans to understand: Without political reform, without economic reform, trade with Cuba will merely enrich Fidel Castro and his cronies. Well-intentioned ideas about trade will merely prop up this dictator, enrich his cronies, and enhance the totalitarian regime. It will not help the Cuban people. With real political and economic reform, trade can benefit the Cuban people and allow them to share in the progress of our times.

If Cuba’s Government takes all the necessary steps to ensure that the 2003 elections are certifiably free and fair—certifiably free and fair—and if Cuba also begins to adopt meaningful market-based reforms, then and only then I will work with the United States Congress to ease the ban on trade and travel between our two countries.

Meaningful reform on Cuba’s part will be answered with a meaningful American response. The goal of the United States policy toward Cuba is not a permanent embargo on Cuba’s economy. The goal is freedom for Cuba’s people.

Today’s initiative invites the Cuban Government to trust and respect Cuban citizens. And I urge other democracies, in this hemisphere and beyond, to use their influence on Cuba’s Government to allow free and fair National Assembly elections and to push for real and meaningful and verifiable reform.

Full normalization of relations with Cuba—diplomatic recognition, open trade, and a robust aid program—will only be possible when Cuba has a new government that is fully democratic, when the rule of law is respected, and when the human rights of all Cubans are fully protected.

Yet, under the Initiative for a New Cuba, the United States recognizes that freedom sometimes grows step by step, and we’ll encourage those steps. The current of history runs strongly toward freedom. Our plan is to accelerate freedom’s progress in Cuba in every way possible, just as the United States

and our democratic friends and allies did successfully in places like Poland or in South Africa. Even as we seek to end tyranny, we will work to make life better for people living under and resisting Castro's rule.

Today I'm announcing a series of actions that will directly benefit the Cuban people and give them greater control of their economic and political destiny. My administration will ease restrictions on humanitarian assistance by legitimate U.S. religious and other nongovernmental organizations that directly serve the needs of the Cuban people and will help build Cuban civil society. And the United States will provide such groups with direct assistance that can be used for humanitarian and entrepreneurial activities. Our Government will offer scholarships in the United States for Cuban students and professionals who try to build independent civil institutions in Cuba and scholarships for family members of political prisoners. We are willing to negotiate direct mail service between the United States and Cuba. My administration will also continue to look for ways to modernize Radio and TV Marti, because even the strongest walls of oppression cannot stand when the floodgates of information and knowledge are opened.

And in the months ahead, my administration will continue to work with leaders all around our country, leaders who love freedom for Cuba, to implement new ways to empower individuals to enhance the chance for freedom.

The United States will continue to enforce economic sanctions on Cuba and the ban on travel to Cuba until Cuba's Government proves that it is committed to real reform. We will continue to prohibit U.S. financing for Cuban purchases of U.S. agricultural goods, because this would just be a foreign aid program in disguise, which would benefit the current regime.

Today's initiative offers Cuba's Government a different path leading to a different future, a future of greater democracy and prosperity and respect. With real reform in Cuba, our countries can begin chipping away at four decades of distrust and division. And the choice rests with Mr. Castro.

Today, there is only one nation in our hemisphere that is not a democracy—only

one. There is only one national leader whose position of power owes more to bullets than ballots. Fidel Castro has a chance to escape this lonely and stagnant isolation. If he accepts our offer, he can bring help to his people and hope to our relations. If Mr. Castro refuses our offer, he will be protecting his cronies at the expense of his people. And eventually, despite all his tools of oppression, Fidel Castro will need to answer to his people.

Jose Marti said, "Barriers of ideas are stronger than barricades of stone." For the benefit of Cuba's people, it is time for Mr. Castro to cast aside old and failed ideas and to start to think differently about the future. Today could mark a new dawn in a long friendship between our people, but only if the Castro regime sees the light.

Cuba's independence was achieved a century ago. It was hijacked nearly half a century ago. Yet, the independent spirit of the Cuban people has never faltered, and it has never been stronger than it is today. The United States is proud to stand with all Cubans and all Cuban Americans who love freedom. And we will continue to stand with you until liberty returns to the land you love so well.

Viva Cuba Libre.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:15 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Fidel Castro of Cuba. He also referred to Operation Pedro Pan, a 1960s immigration program in which thousands of Cuban children were sent to the United States by their parents. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks on the 100th Anniversary of Cuban Independence in Miami, Florida

May 20, 2002

The President. Thank you very much. *Sientense. Voy a hablar en Español hoy, pero no. No. [Laughter] No quiero destruir un idioma que bonita, y por eso voy a hablar en Ingles. [Laughter]* Thank you for having me. God bless you all, and thanks for coming. It is such an honor—it is such an honor—